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Sweden

Biotechnology

Sweden Approves First Genetically Engineered Product for Commercial Planting

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Report Highlights:
The Swedish Board of Agriculture has approved commercial growing of a genetically engineered starch potato developed in Sweden. Before planting can commence, however, approval of other EU member states must be obtained.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Stockholm [SW1]
[SW]

A genetically engineered (GE) starch potato might be the first commercially grown GE product in Sweden. On April 8, 2004, the Swedish Board of Agriculture (BOA) approved an application for GE starch potato EH92-527-1. Before commercial planting in Sweden can be allowed, however, the EH92-527-1 starch potato application must be ultimately approved by other EU member states. This is expected to be a lengthy process.

The Swedish BOA is recommending to other EU member states that this particular potato variety be approved for industrial use, but not for food use. It is also recommending that by-products from starch production be allowed for use in feed and fertilizer production. In its statement, the BOA has stressed the need for measures that assure that the EH92-527-1 potato will not enter the food chain. To this end, the applicant, a biotech company called Amylogen HB, has established an Identity Preservation System (IPS) for separation, control and documentation. This system includes a detailed plan for the direction, control, supervision, documentation and handling of the potato in all stages of the production chain.

Although no GE products have been commercially grown in Sweden thusfar, field trials for GE starch potatoes have been conducted since 1994. Amylogen HB submitted its first application for EH92-527-1 in 1996, but subsequently updated it to conform with EU Directive 2001/18/EG. The BOA has emphasized that if approved by the EU, any commercial growing of this potato will be carefully monitored for years to come for possible unintended spread into the environment.

The EH92-527-1 potato has been genetically engineered to increase the presence of amylopectin starch from 85% to 98% and decrease amylose starch content from 15% to 2%. This reportedly results in a starch that will be superior for use in certain industrial applications such as surface finishing of paper.

The Swedish government's decision to approve commercial plantings of this potato is line with its earlier expressed desire to see a re-start of GMO approvals by the EU now that new EU Traceability and Labeling and Food and Feed regulations have been adopted. At the December 8, 2003 meeting of the EU Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, Sweden was among the countries that voted in favor of approving the BT-11 corn variety.